

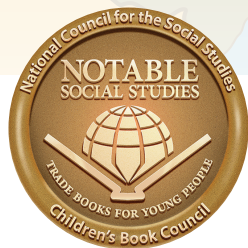


# Tutti's Promise



A novel based  
on a family's true  
story of courage  
and hope during  
the Holocaust

**K. Heidi  
Fishman**





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MB PUBLISHING

Tutti's Promise: A novel based on a family's true story of courage and hope during the Holocaust

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Summary: Based upon actual recollections, documents, and interviews about their ordeal during the Holocaust in the Netherlands, this is the remarkable story of the Lichtenstern family—of their courage and perseverance, determination and hope—during the darkest days of human history.

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To learn more about this story, please visit [www.kheidifishman.com](http://www.kheidifishman.com). There you'll find more photographs and historical documents, Ruth "Tutti" Lichtenstern Fishman's video testimony, research links, and discussion questions.

**Note to Readers:**

While reading this story, you may refer to the Historical Notes section in the back of the book for further information and explanations.

*For my mother, Ruth "Tutti" Lichtenstern Fishman.  
Thank you for being an inspiration to so many and for  
showering your family with unconditional love.*

*— K. Heidi Fishman*

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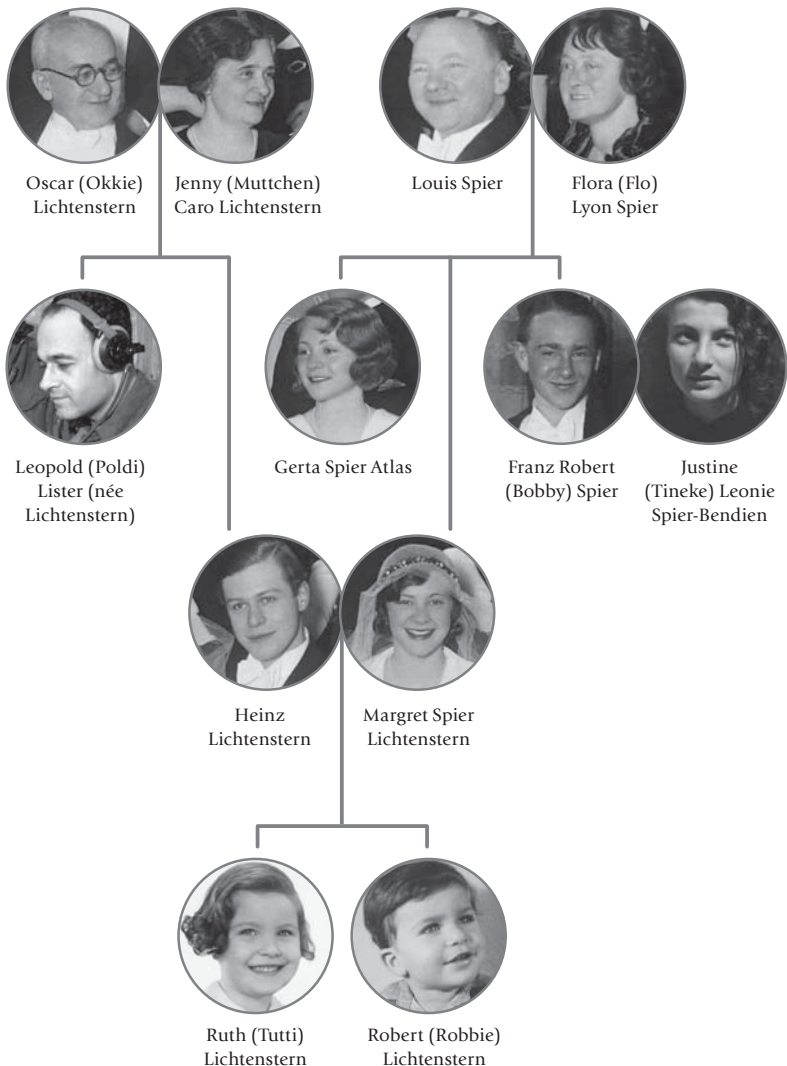


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Between 1938 and early 1940, Germany annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia and invaded Poland, Denmark, and Norway. In May 1940, Germany took over Belgium, Luxembourg, France, and the Netherlands.

# The Lichtenstern Family Tree





Tutti with her parents, Margret and Heinz (1935)

# Prologue

Tutti, eighty years old, was sitting outside the principal's office.

She wasn't a student, of course, but was a guest at the school. The principal had invited her to talk with the eighth-graders about her childhood under the Nazis.

This was not the first school Tutti had visited to tell her story, and so by now, she knew by heart what she wanted to say. The first time she had spoken to a group of children, she had carefully written out her talk on index cards. Now she left the cards at home.

*My name is Ruth Lichtenstern Fishman, but everyone calls me Tutti, she always began. I was born on July 17, 1935, in Cologne, Germany.*

*Two years earlier, Adolph Hitler had come to power, and the Nazis started passing anti-Jewish laws, keeping Jews out of certain jobs and schools and burning books by Jewish authors. Then in September 1935, the Nazis told us that we were no longer German citizens.*

*My father and grandfather worked for a metals-trading company called Oxyde. The owner was Jewish, and he decided to move his business to the Netherlands. So in 1936, my family moved there, too. But four years later, we found out that we hadn't moved far enough away from danger . . .*



Tutti Lichtenstern Fishman, age 80

# 1

## Invasion

May 10, 1940



Tutti awoke with a start. Robbie was crying. She heard strange sounds outside—big booms. Juffie, the nanny, was rocking two-year-old Robbie and trying to get him back to sleep. Tutti, nearly five years old, climbed out of bed and found Mammi and Pappi peering out the window in their pajamas.

“Mammi, what is that noise?” asked Tutti.

“Margret, look who’s here,” Heinz said. “Did all that commotion outside wake you, Tutti?”

“Yes, Pappi,” she answered, rubbing her eyes.

Mammi quickly picked her up. “Whatever it is, it’s far away,” she said. “Don’t be scared.”

Mammi brought Tutti back to the nursery and tucked her into bed. She collected Robbie from Juffie and patted his back until he settled down. Then she gently laid him in his bed and pulled the soft blanket up to his shoulders. She kissed Tutti on the forehead, smoothed her red curls, and picked her doll up off the floor, placing it next to her. “*Gute Nacht*,” she whispered. “Juffie will stay right here, so there’s no need to be frightened. I’ll let you know what all of this is about in the morning.”



But when the sun came up, with the buzz of airplane motors in the distance, Tutti became focused on something new. She wondered why the radio was on so early and why Pappi scowled and gripped the sides of his armchair as he listened to it. "Mammi, why is the radio on? What is Pappi listening to?"

"Shh, Tutti," said Mammi. "Pappi needs to hear the news."

*"German troops have crossed the Dutch frontier and are in contact with our border forces. There have been landing attempts by enemy aircraft and paratroopers,"* squawked the radio.

"Pappi, why is the radio so loud?" Tutti asked.

"Shh, Tutti," Pappi insisted.

"Heinz, please turn down the radio," said Mammi, lifting her eyebrows slightly. "The children are awake now," she said, scooting them into the kitchen for breakfast.

*"The bridges over the Meuse and IJssel have been destroyed."*

Robbie began to cry. Mammi picked him up and walked to the window.

*"At least seventy German planes were shot down, with Germans using Dutch prisoners as cover."*

Tutti ran back to the living room. "Pappi, can we turn on some music? Robbie doesn't like this man's voice and neither do I."

"*Um Gottes Willen!*" Pappi bellowed. "Margret, please keep the children with you. This news is important." He got up to adjust the dial and remained standing beside the radio, scowling.

Mammi took Tutti by the hand and led her away, but it was impossible not to hear what the announcer was saying.



*"Paratroopers have landed at strategic points near Rotterdam, The Hague, Amsterdam, and other large cities . . ."*

All three sat at the table, but Mammi stood up a minute later. "Tutti, please help Robbie with his breakfast. Juffie's not here. She left to make sure her sister is all right. I'll be right back." Mammi went into the living room and turned down the blaring radio, but she didn't return to the table right away.

*"And now I will read Queen Wilhelmina's speech to the people of the Netherlands,"* Tutti heard the announcer say. She listened carefully, but he said a lot of words she didn't understand:

*"To my people! After our country has scrupulously maintained neutrality, last night the German troops suddenly attacked our territory without the slightest warning . . . I herewith protest against this unprecedented violation of good faith and condemn*



Tutti and Robbie Lichtenstern (1940)



*the attack as a flagrant violation of international law and decency. My government and I will now do our duty. You must do yours with the utmost watchfulness and with inner calmness and devotion . . ."*

Heinz turned off the radio and stood to give Margret a hug. "The phones aren't working. We have to check on our parents," he said.

"You're right. They must be worried about us, too."

"I'll go to my parents' apartment first and then Flo and Louis's. It won't take me long. I'll be back in an hour or two," Heinz said, squeezing his wife's hand.

When Mammi came back into the kitchen, Tutti saw she had tears in her eyes. She hadn't really understood what the announcer was saying, but she knew it wasn't good news.



**gute Nacht** (goo•tuh nahkht): good night (German)

**Juffie** (yoo•fee): A nickname meaning "Missy" (Dutch)

**Tutti** (tu•tee; u, as in the oo in took): Ruth Lichtenstern's nickname

**um Gottes Willen** (oom gawt•ehs vill•uhn): for God's sake (German)

## 2

# A Date with Uncle Bobby

Summer 1940



*Within five days of the invasion, the Dutch army surrendered, and the Germans marched into Amsterdam. A small fraction of the population joined the Dutch Nazi Party (NSB), but hundreds of thousands of Netherlanders rebelled through acts of brave resistance—going on strike, creating underground newspapers, and hiding Jews. Some engaged in sabotage, such as cutting phone lines, destroying rail lines, and disabling German vehicles.*

*Those Jews who tried to flee were mostly unsuccessful. The country's geography and the dangerous Nazi-infested North Sea made escape essentially impossible.*

*If only the land had had a different topography. If only it had not been devoid of mountains and forests, which would have provided sanctuary and cover. If only the surrounding countries had not already fallen under German control. Then the fate of the Jews in the Netherlands might have been much different than it was.*

*But Tutti was blissfully unaware of all this . . . and was especially happy one summer day after she turned five . . .*



"Come, Tutti. Let's get you dressed. Your uncle Bobby will be here soon." Mammi opened the closet and easily slid the hangers across the rod one by one until she found the dress she was looking for. "How about this one?" She pulled out a blue dress with white trim. Tutti had worn it only a couple of times and just loved the way it swished around her legs when she twirled.

"Mammi, where is Uncle Bobby taking me to lunch?" Tutti was already shedding her play clothes.

"The Blauwe Theehuis in the Vondelpark. Do you think you'll like that?"

"Oh, the Vondelpark!" Tutti jumped up and down. "Can we feed the ducks?"

"I'm sure you can." Margret smiled at the child's enthusiasm and felt her heart fill with love. For Tutti, little had changed since Germany's invasion. But for Margret, there was tremendous concern: How would each new policy affect them? The Nazis had recently ordered Jewish-owned businesses to hang up signs that read "Jewish business." How would Heinz's job be affected? And how would she keep her family safe?

Margret held the dress for Tutti to step into and then buttoned up the back. She watched as Tutti spun around and her little dress flared out. How simple things could bring her child such joy! Margret would do whatever it took to make sure that Tutti could enjoy these little pleasures—a new dress and lunch with her handsome young uncle—and not have to worry about the war. She helped Tutti with her socks and shoes and completed the outfit with her new coat. Just as they were buttoning it, there was a knock at the door.



Tutti about to leave on her date with Margret's brother, Tutti's Uncle Bobby

"Uncle Bobby!" Tutti ran to Bobby and threw her body into his open arms. Bobby, dressed in a blue suit and striped tie, his hair smartly parted to the side, lifted a package above his head so Tutti's embrace wouldn't crush it. He laughed at her exuberance and returned the hug.

"Is that present for me?" Tutti asked.

"No, sweetheart, this gift is for Robbie. It's a pony."

"Oh, he'll like that. But why can't I have a present too, Uncle Bobby?" she protested.

"I'm taking you out to lunch. I brought this for your brother since he's too little to join us. Now which would you rather have, a present or an afternoon out with your favorite uncle?"

Tutti thought it would be nice to have both but understood that it wasn't something to say out loud. Anyway, she soon forgot all about Robbie's present because the afternoon was so much fun. She felt like a teenager on a first date.

Her uncle ordered them pancakes with jam. Tutti tried to remember all the manners her parents had taught her. She put her napkin on her lap and didn't use her fingers to eat her pancake, except once. The hardest rule to remember—because she had so much to tell her uncle—was not to talk with her mouth full!

For dessert, Bobby ordered a whole tray of little cakes—with pink and white and yellow icing, and little candied violets and tiny silver balls. They were so beautiful she could hardly stand to eat them. "Enjoy them now, Tuttchen," her uncle said, taking a bite of one. "If this war goes on, there won't be so many nice things to eat."

When Bobby finished his coffee, they strolled to the pond. Tutti crouched by the water's edge and watched how the ducklings followed their mother around. "Are you and Aunt Tineke going to have a baby, Uncle Bobby?"

"Someday . . . that's certainly the hope. Why do you ask, Tutti?"

"Well, because then I could have a cousin to play with," she said, throwing a handful of crumbs to the ducks. "All of mine live far away. Why did everyone move to England?"

Bobby looked uncomfortable. "Oh, Tutti, people move for lots of reasons." He threw the last of the crumbs into the water and brushed off his hands, one against the other. "Maybe your mammi can explain it better than I can. But you know what? I'll see what I can do about having a baby soon—just for you."



**Blauwe Theehuis** (blau **tay**•house): Blue Teahouse (Dutch)

**Tuttchen** (tuhtch•ehn): An endearing nickname for Tutti (German)

# 3

## Egbert

Early October 1940



Heinz was startled by the ringing phone. He looked at the clock—eleven thirty. Jumping out of bed, he grabbed his robe and hurried to the study to see who was calling.

*"Hallo?"*

*"Heinz, this is Egbert. I need to talk with you."*

Egbert de Jong was Heinz's friend and colleague, someone he had known for years. But a call like this, especially at this time of night, was quite unusual.

Before the German invasion, Egbert had worked for the Dutch government as the state minister in charge of nonferrous (non-iron) metals. As a metals trader, Heinz interacted with him constantly, and the two men had become true friends.

*"Egbert, now? It's almost midnight."*

*"Ja. I know. Sorry, but this is important. I'd like to come and meet with you tomorrow."*

*"Sure, come to the office—"*

*"No, this isn't something to be discussed at the office. It's better if I come to your house tomorrow. Tell Margret not to fuss."*



The next afternoon, Margret served biscuits and coffee to Heinz and Egbert, who tapped his foot and played with his spoon, hardly touching his cup. Margret did her best to pretend not to notice and tried to make small talk, but the conversation flagged.

"Egbert, what is it? What do you need to discuss with me?" said Heinz finally.

"It's a long story and I hardly know where to begin," his friend replied. "Can we go into your study and speak alone? Margret, please excuse us. I don't want to bore you with shoptalk."

Heinz closed the door to the study and motioned for Egbert to sit down, more puzzled and more apprehensive than ever. He'd had trouble getting back to sleep after Egbert's phone call the night before, and now his head ached. "Please, Egbert, you must explain." And Egbert finally did.

The Germans had asked him to stay on as their German state minister for nonferrous metals in the Netherlands and guide the Dutch metals trade for Hitler's regime, the Third Reich. Heinz was not surprised; Egbert was highly educated—fluent in five languages—and had polished manners. He was also extraordinarily good at his job in the metals industry.

"I thought it over long and hard, and I have accepted the job," Egbert said. Somewhat uncomfortably, he added, "You understand it's not because I want to help the Germans, but I felt I had no choice. And I think—I hope—that I might someday be able to do something to stymie them."

Heinz said nothing. He was trying to make sense of what he was hearing.

"Heinz, let me bring you up to date," Egbert went on. "The Germans have appointed a Paul Zimmermann as the

commissioner for the Office of Reichs Metal. This Nazi general likes me—trusts me. Heaven knows why . . . I must be a good actor. Anyway, over the course of the past few months, this General Zimmermann has become convinced that I am completely behind the Nazi cause."

"Egbert, that's ridiculous!"

"Well, of course it is, Heinz! But it's a good thing he thinks so, because now he trusts me with incredibly sensitive information—which is why I'm here. Three weeks ago, Zimmermann summoned me to Berlin for a meeting. When we met, he told me about the Nazis' plan for the Netherlands."

Heinz sat up straighter in his seat as his friend continued: "Zimmermann swore me to secrecy, but I can't keep this a secret. It's too horrendous. He said that the Germans are planning to take over all businesses that are run by Jews. First, the firms will have to register; then, Aryan directors and supervisors will be appointed. Once they are in control of the companies, they will ship the Jewish workers and owners to Poland."

"So they are going to steal our livelihoods right out from under us?" asked Heinz.

"Heinz, you aren't listening. They aren't merely going to take your job—they are going to send you to Poland! All Jews are to be deported and forced to live in ghettos or assigned to work camps or . . ." Egbert didn't finish his sentence. He simply grimaced and shook his head.

*Unbelievable! Unthinkable!* Heinz was out of his chair and pacing around the study now. *Forced deportations? Work camps? No, it wasn't possible.* "Egbert, there are over 140,000 Jews in this country. They can't possibly . . ."

"Heinz, that's their plan. You've heard the news. You know how bad it is already. Jews by the thousands are





Heinz Lichtenstern

being forced to live in ghettos in Poland. They are cut off from the outside world. There are reports of starvation, beatings, shootings, and epidemics in these ghettos. Italy and Japan recently signed a pact with Germany. Vichy France has devised its own laws to discriminate against Jews. No place is safe anymore. These brutes want to take over the entire world with their sick ideology. All they care about is power . . . and that means they're ruthless. All people whom these Nazi thugs consider inferior are in danger—especially the Jews. But . . . I think I can protect you."

"How?" Heinz asked. His head hurt and he was struggling to process what Egbert was saying.

"This is how I figure it. The Germans will need metal for their war. You are the leading metals trader in the country. I will tell them that you are essential."

"Egbert, I don't want to help the Germans!"

"You don't have to, at least not too much. We just need them to *think* you're assisting. I'm going to talk with Josef Sax from Hoogovens Steel, as well. Do you know him?"

Heinz nodded. "He's a good man."

"And I was thinking about Leopold Oberländer. What do you think of him?"

"Egbert, Oberländer is exceptionally smart. He knows everything about manufacturing. I think he even holds some patents."

"Good . . . then I can protect them this way, too. I've already put in an urgent request with the authorities for you to come to my office in The Hague. Since you are now acting director of Oxyde, this shouldn't seem an unreasonable request. I want the Germans to see that I consider you indispensable."

"All right, Egbert. I trust you. And I appreciate your wanting to help me. But I also want to see if I can get to England or America."

"It's too late for that, Heinz!" said Egbert.

Heinz hung his head and rubbed his eyes.

Egbert was pained at seeing his friend's distress. "Heinz, maybe I'm wrong," he said. "Perhaps there *will* be a way."

The friends clasped hands before leaving Heinz's study to rejoin Margret, who was reading to the children. Egbert bent down to give Tutti and Robbie a parting kiss on their foreheads and then embraced Margret and Heinz in turn. "Stay strong, you two," he whispered. "And stay safe. We'll get through this."



**hallo** (hah • loa): hello (Dutch)

**ja** (yah): yes (Dutch)

# 4

## Entrust

March 1941



After his meeting with Egbert, Heinz had only one thing on his mind: money. Every cent mattered. He made phone calls. He talked with his closest friends. As the months passed, he counted every guilder.

Egbert's plan—for the Germans to regard Heinz as an indispensable metals expert—was well and good, but Heinz had plans of his own: Egbert was going to help him protect his family—and save his friends. He would be ready if Egbert's request for him to travel to The Hague was approved.

It was a long winter of waiting. And as he waited, he felt the Nazis tightening their noose around his neck. That fall, the Germans began requiring that businesses owned by Jews, or having one Jewish partner or director, be registered. Egbert had been right. As 1940 turned to 1941, the Germans ordered that all radios be registered. And in February, after a Dutch Nazi was killed by a Jew, over 400 Jews were rounded up and deported from Amsterdam. Heinz couldn't wait any longer—he had to put his plan into action now.



"Mr. de Jong, this is Heinz Lichtenstern." He was calling Egbert from the office and was aware that anything he said might be heard by Egbert's supervisor. His friend's phone could be bugged, or Zimmermann could be sitting in the office right next to Egbert.

"Ah, Lichtenstern. Good to hear from you," replied Egbert. "How can I help?"

"I have an important matter to discuss with you," Heinz replied. "You told me to keep you informed of all possible sources for different alloys. I've identified a potential prospect, and I'm afraid that if we wait much longer, we might lose out. The deal might get taken by another buyer."

"Lichtenstern, I knew I could count on you. You have good instincts. Shall I come to Amsterdam later today?"

"Yes, as soon as you can. I need your advice on this particular opportunity."

When he hung up the phone, he sighed with relief. Egbert knew what he was talking about, but the Nazis wouldn't.



While Heinz waited for Egbert to arrive, he paced the floor. He went to the window constantly and looked for his friend. What if Egbert didn't come alone? What if he brought a supervisor? Then his whole plan would fall apart.

Margret brought him a small glass of brandy, and he sat down without uttering a word. The brandy was strong and warmed his throat and chest. He needed this. He reached into his pocket for his cigarettes and then remembered he had smoked the last one on the way home from the office. His hands shook as he took another sip of the brandy.

"Margret, do we have any more cigarettes?"

She left the room and returned with half a pack. What would he ever do without her?

When at last the bell rang, Heinz saw that Egbert was not alone. With him were his wife, Jo, and his three daughters. "*Goedendag!*" said Egbert as the family came into the house and out of the early spring rain.

"Egbert, I was worried. You're an hour late."

"The trains aren't as reliable as they used to be, Heinz."

"Margret, Jo—Egbert and I need to discuss business first. We'll join you ladies for a coffee later."

While Tutti led Egbert's daughters to her room to play, Margret and Jo made their way to the kitchen. Once the two men were in the study, Heinz slid shut the heavy pocket door and handed Egbert a thick envelope. Egbert peered inside and his eyes widened. "How much is this?"

"It's 130,000 guilders. It's all the money I've been able to scrape together over the past five months."

"What do you want me to do with it?"

"I want you to take care of it for me. When we left Germany in 1936, the Nazis took nearly everything. They only allowed me to leave with a small fraction of what I owned. *They* called it a flight tax for emigrating. *I* called it highway robbery. They will come after my money again. You told me so yourself. Please take this."

"Heinz, this is a lot of money. Are you sure?"

"Egbert, I actually thought that when we moved to Amsterdam, we would be all right. Can you believe it?" Heinz gave something between a laugh and a snort and then crushed his cigarette into the ashtray. "I thought they would leave this country alone. I should have followed my brother and taken Margret and the children to England. I made a mistake." Heinz cleared his throat and looked straight into



Egbert de Jong at his office in The Hague

the eyes of his friend. "I beg you." His voice cracked, and he hesitated. He knew that what he was about to ask could put his friend in danger, but he was desperate. "Egbert, do you know Jakob Jorysch in Basel?"

"Of course. I did plenty of deals with him when I was still a trader myself. But what does he have to do with this?"

"There are ways to procure passports for South American countries. If you can contact him . . ."

"You don't have to say another word," Egbert said. "I understand. I will protect your money and use it to get you a passport if I can."

"Egbert, not only me—all of my friends at Oxyde! My parents. Margret's parents. Look. Here, I have another envelope for you. But you have to be even more cautious with this one."

Egbert took the envelope and glanced inside. It contained several small photos, each with a name and a birthdate written on the back.

Heinz continued to speak as Egbert shuffled through the photos. "All these families contributed to that pile of money I gave you. Use the money. Use it to help us get out of here. But don't let this envelope with the pictures fall into the wrong hands. It could land *you* in one of those camps we're all trying to avoid."

"You can trust me. I'll do this. And I'll return whatever is left after this war is finished and life is normal again."

"That day can't come soon enough," replied Heinz. "Let's find Jo and Margret and have a drink."



**guilders** (gil•ders): Dutch currency (Dutch)

**goedendag** (hoo•den•dakh): good day (Dutch)

# 5

## Changes

Fall 1941



"I'm all ready for school, Mammi," Tutti announced as she came into the kitchen. She was wearing the blouse and the skirt that she and Mammi had laid out yesterday evening, and her curly hair was neatly brushed.

Mammi gave her a hug. "Pappi, doesn't Tutti look pretty for her first day of school?" Tutti held out her skirt and did a little twirl for Pappi, but he didn't glance up from his paper and seemed not to have heard Mammi.

"Heinz, put that newspaper down and give your daughter a proper 'Good morning,' please. Now doesn't she look nice on her first day of school?"

This time Heinz looked up. "You do indeed, Tutti." He folded the paper, put it in his briefcase, and gave her a big smile. But when he turned to Margret, the smile was practically gone. "Sorry, but I have a busy day ahead of me. I'll be home late." He put on his suit coat and headed out the door.

Mammi took a deep breath and shook her head. Then she smiled at Tutti as she placed a plate with apple slices, bread, cheese, and jam on the table. "Never mind Pappi, Tutti. He's working quite hard nowadays, so we need to be understanding."



Tutti knew Pappi was working hard. Some evenings, he didn't get home until after she was in bed. And on many days, he left in the morning before she and Robbie ate breakfast. But she didn't mind because Mammi was here. And Juffie, too, though Mammi had said that Juffie would be leaving soon. Robbie had cried when he heard, but he was still a baby, after all. Still, even Tutti didn't really understand why Juffie was leaving. Mammi said it was because the Germans had made a new rule: non-Jews were not allowed to work for Jews.

Tutti was starting to get anxious about these new rules. A couple of weeks ago, her mother had sat beside her at bedtime and explained to her that she would be going to a new school this year. She used her happy voice when she told Tutti about it—the same voice she used when she wanted Tutti to eat her carrots. “The new school will be wonderful, *mein kleines Mädchen*. It's so close by—closer than your old school—and your friends Ursula and Rachel will be there.”

“But why do I have to go to a new school?” Tutti asked her. “What's wrong with my old school? I want to be with *all* my friends, not just Ursula and Rachel.”

“Tuttchen, there are new rules now that the Germans are in charge. You know Jews may only go to Jewish stores and Jewish doctors. Now we have our own schools, too—a school for Jews. Don't you think you'll like that?”

“No, I don't,” Tutti sputtered, her tears beginning to fall.

“It's another change, and I know you don't like that. I'm sorry.” Mammi's voice was kind and gentle, and she leaned in close to Tutti and smoothed her hair away from her face. “But this way, no one will tease you because you're Jewish, and nobody will get to do things that the other children can't do.”

“I won't like it. I won't like it at all,” Tutti said.



Soon after school began, Mammi and Pappi told her that Jews could no longer go to restaurants, theaters, swimming pools, beaches, zoos, or museums. She would not even be able to visit her favorite place in the world—the Vondelpark.

Tutti wished she could keep herself from crying; she knew it troubled Mammi and Pappi and that the changes weren't their fault. But something in her eyes and heart just had to cry.



**mein kleines Mädchen** (mine **kline**•uhs **meh**•tchehn): my little girl (German)

# 6

## Stars

May 1942



"Tutti! Robbie! Please come here," Mammi called as she walked through the door.

The children ran to greet her. "Mammi, did you bring us anything? Was there any *stroopwafel* at the bakery today?" They could practically taste their favorite Dutch treat with the caramel filling.

"I'm sorry, *Kinder*. No treats today. Maybe tomorrow." Mammi laid her mesh shopping bag on the table. Visible inside was a small parcel wrapped in brown paper. "Come, let's have a snack. I need to explain something to you."

"What's in the parcel, Mammi?" Tutti asked.

"That's what I want to talk to you about. But first let's eat something." Mammi took an apple from a bowl on the table and began peeling it with a paring knife. She held the handle in her fist and kept her thumb against the side of the blade. As she worked the knife with her right hand, she slowly turned the apple with her left. The entire skin came off in one long strip. Tutti loved to watch her produce these single spiraling apple skins, and she couldn't wait to be old enough to use a sharp knife herself so she could peel an apple just the way her mother did. Mammi cut the apple into pieces and put them on a plate.



This is a photograph of Tutti's first-grade class. Tutti is standing in the second row from the top, two places away from her teacher on the right. Tutti's friend Ursula Heilbut is in the same row, second from the left.



"*Kinder*, look." She took the parcel from her mesh bag and unfolded the brown paper. Inside were pieces of yellow cloth. "Here, you can each hold one."

"What are they, Mammi?" Tutti asked.

"Tutti, can't you see?" said Robbie. "They're stars, of course."

"That's right, Robbie," Mammi interjected. "Do you know what kind of stars?"

"Yellow!" he shouted. "What does it say in the middle?"

"Can you read it, *manneke*?" she asked.

"Does it say 'star'?"

"No, Robbie," Tutti answered. "It says jay-oh-oh-dee—*Jood*. That's Jew. Mammi, what are they for?"

"There's a new rule. All Jews over the age of six have to wear these stars whenever they're not at home," she answered simply.

"I'm only four," Robbie said, holding up four fingers.

"That's right, dear, so you don't have to wear one."

"But what are the stars *for*?" Tutti asked again.

"So they'll know who's Jewish and who isn't," Mammi answered. Tutti could hear the slight catch in her mother's voice.

"How do you wear them?" asked Robbie, as he put one on his head. "Like this?"

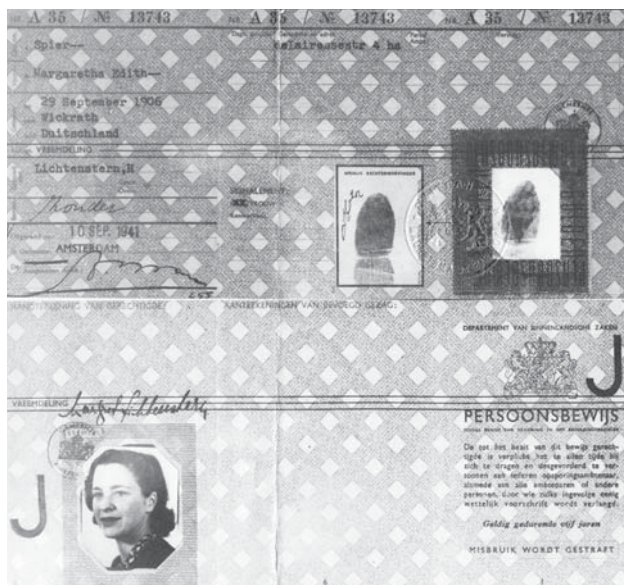
"No, silly boy." Mammi smiled but looked away for a moment. "I'll sew them to our clothes. Tutti, can you bring me your coat and two sweaters?"

When Tutti returned, she said, "Mammi, these stars are so the Germans can make sure we're following their rules, aren't they?"

"Yes, *Mädchen*. You're so smart."

"Why don't we just *not* wear them? If we don't wear them, we can pretend we aren't Jewish."





*Weißt du, wie viel Sternlein stehen  
An dem blauen Himmelszelt?  
Weißt du, wie viel Wolken gehen  
Weit hin über alle Welt?  
Gott der Herr hat, sie gezählet,  
Dass ihm auch nicht eines fehlet  
An der ganzen großen Zahl,  
An der ganzen großen Zahl.*

*Can you count the stars that brightly  
twinkle in the midnight sky?  
Can you count the clouds, so lightly  
o'er the meadows floating by?  
God, the Lord, doth mark their number,  
With His eyes that never slumber;  
He hath made them every one,  
He hath made them every one.*

Mammi's stitches were even, as if she were mending a hem on one of Tutti's dresses. But every once in a while, Tutti saw her shake her head, and the humming would stop.



**Jood** (yod): Jew (Dutch)

**Kinder** (kihnd•ehr): children (German)

**Mädchen** (meh•tchehn): girl (German)

**manneke** (mahn•neh•kuh): little man (Dutch)

**stroopwafel** (stroop•wahf•uhl): a caramel-filled waffle (Dutch)



# 7

## Hopeless



"Margret, it's no use," Heinz whispered one night. He had lain in bed for what seemed like hours, waiting for sleep to rescue him from his growing sense of despair.

Margret, who had been awake herself, began to gently stroke his back to comfort him.

"Margret, it's hopeless . . . I thought Egbert would be able to help—to get us false papers. I haven't heard a word." Heinz's voice cracked as he tried to express his worst anxieties. "Why did we come here? Why didn't we move to England? Why . . . why? We're stateless—and the next step is deportation to one of those camps—Westerbork or somewhere worse."

"We didn't know that the Nazis would invade the Netherlands, Heinz. We couldn't have known."

"I think . . . maybe . . ." He couldn't get the words out.

"What?" she asked gently.

"Maybe we should turn on the gas in the oven and die by our own hands."

Margret sat up. "Heinz, have you lost your mind? Why would you say such a thing?"

"Because it's just going to get worse. First the registration, and now those stars we have to wear."

Margret reached over and turned on the bedside lamp.



Heinz and Margret

In its light, she could see her husband's haggard face and anguished expression. "Heinz, that isn't . . . it isn't the right thing . . ."

"But there isn't a scrap of hope." Heinz's voice was nearly a whisper.

Abruptly, Margret climbed out of bed. She couldn't bear to listen to what he was saying for another moment. "You stupid man," she began. "You can't do this. You want to help them? Do you want all the Jews to just kill themselves so

that the Nazis can have their Jew-free Europe? What about our children? Do you want to put their heads in the oven, too? Or were you simply planning to leave them to deal with the Germans on their own?" With each question, Margret's voice became louder and harsher.

Heinz looked at his wife in tears. "Margret, I know what's coming. How are we going to survive?"

"We just will, Heinz. That's all." She sat down again and took his hand. "Listen to me. Germany was defeated in 1918, and it won't win this time either. We will get through this. But not like that. Not by thinking about suicide."

Heinz knew that Margret was an optimist, someone who tended to see the positive side of any situation, who believed that every problem had a solution and that bad luck was only temporary. Her optimism was one of the qualities that he had fallen in love with in the first place. He had to find a way to access her strength. He wiped away his tears and felt the pressure of her hand on his, a pressure he tried to return. "I don't know how . . ." he started.

"Together, Heinz. We will get through this together."

## 8

# Spiraling

July 1942



Tutti stretched out on the floor below the window, reading a book. Outside, the sky was still light—it was July, and the sun didn't set until ten o'clock. She could hear the voices of boys playing ball and girls jumping rope.

*In spin de bocht gaat in*  
*Uit spuit de bocht gaat uit*  
Go in the spinning loop  
Out you go from the loop

She wanted to be outside, too, but that was not allowed. As Mammi had explained to Robbie and her the week before, there was another new rule from the Germans, called a curfew: all Jews had to be in their own homes from eight o'clock at night until six o'clock the next morning.

Earlier that evening, at exactly ten minutes to eight, Mammi had come out on the stoop and called, "Come inside, Tuttchen!"

"But Rachel, ETTY, and I are having a jump rope contest, Mammi. We need to finish. Please, can't we play a little longer?"

"You can play outside again tomorrow. Rachel has to go home, too. Her mother will be coming for her any minute." And seconds later, Rachel's mother appeared, grabbed her daughter wordlessly by the arm, and pulled her away.

Without Rachel, the contest couldn't continue, and Tutti had reluctantly followed her mother inside. But how unfair it seemed. While other children were still enjoying the summer breeze—still shouting and laughing with each other—Tutti had to stay inside in her stuffy, cramped room.

She wished the new apartment, where they had moved a few weeks ago, weren't so small. Mammi and Pappi occupied one bedroom, Robbie and Tutti shared another, and Muttchen and Okkie, Pappi's parents, slept in the living room. The six of them made do with one bathroom. "Pappi is trying to save money now," Mammi had said when Tutti asked why they had to leave De Lairesestraat and move to Diezestraat. "This new apartment is cheaper. It's small, but we're lucky to be together."

Tutti knew that sometimes Mammi didn't feel so lucky. In such close quarters, she could often hear Mammi and Pappi talking at night about other relatives. She knew that Uncle Bobby and Aunt Tineke were missing, and that Mammi was terribly worried about what had become of them. They had planned to sneak out of the Netherlands—had paid a boat captain to smuggle them across the North Sea—but somebody alerted the Gestapo, and they had been arrested.

"If only they had managed to make it to England!" she heard Mammi saying tearfully one evening. Tutti didn't mean to eavesdrop, but the sound carried readily through the apartment's thin walls. She knew they were talking about Uncle Bobby again.

There was a pause while Pappi said something Tutti couldn't hear. Then there was Mammi's voice again, firmer now: "I know, but it's just a rumor. There is no definite information. I won't assume the worst. I must believe he is alive unless I find out something different."

The next morning, Mammi got breakfast for the family as cheerfully as ever. When Robbie balked at eating his hot cereal, Mammi was as patient with him as she always was.

"Mammi," Tutti began, as she helped her mother clear the breakfast dishes. She wanted to know about Uncle Bobby—what the rumor was. "I heard you talking about Uncle Bobby and Aunt Tineke. Are they all right?" Mammi had the water running and didn't seem to hear the question. "Mammi?"

"Run along and play now, Tuttchen," Muttchen interrupted. "I'll help your mother with the dishes."

Tutti realized that this was a topic her mother didn't want to discuss. She would have to wait to find out about her aunt and uncle.



**Muttchen** (muhtch • ehn): Granny (Tutti and Robbie's paternal grandmother's name was Jenny, but they called her Muttchen) (German)

## 9

# Something to Hold On To

June 20, 1943



*The situation for Jews in the Netherlands continued to deteriorate that summer. On July 15, 1942, more than 1,100 Jewish refugees living in the Netherlands were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau—one of the three main extermination camps in Poland.*

*By April of the next year, Jews in the Netherlands had been forced to live all together in Amsterdam or in one of the two transit camps, Westerbork or Vught. And frequent raids in Jewish neighborhoods were setting everyone's nerves on edge.*



Heinz was incredulous. *I can't believe what I'm reading. "Baggage Shipping to the Camps: What One Needs to Know." A whole page about what one needs to know! So many restrictions.*

*"It is expressly forbidden to put uncensored letters in packages to camps." Are Bobby and Tineke in one of those awful camps?*

*"You are urgently advised to have all papers and documents with you." My papers. Are they in order? Yes, here in my pocket.*

“People who have to go to Westerbork or Vught should have two blankets.”

“Margret, make sure each rucksack has two blankets,” Heinz said without looking up.

“Heinz, do you think we have a dozen extra blankets?” It was Jenny, his mother, who answered. The more anxious her son became, the more nervous she felt. “How can we have six rucksacks packed at all times with two extra blankets each? Besides, we won’t have to go anywhere. You’re on the Jewish Council. We have an exemption.”

“I’m not on the Jewish Council. I’m only on an advisory committee. And yes, we have an exemption. But I don’t trust it. Plenty of people with exemptions have been picked up.”

Calmly, Margret offered a solution. “It’s June. It’s too hot for blankets, anyway. Let’s pack them and just sleep with sheets. We won’t need blankets on the beds for months.

BEWIJS  
VAN AANMELDING,

als bedoeld in artikel 9, eerste lid, van de  
Verordening No. 6/1941 van den Rijks-  
commissaris voor het bezette Nederlandsche  
gebied, betreffende den aanmeldingsplicht  
van personen van geheel of gedeeltelijk  
joodschen bloede.

JOODSCHE RAAD VOOR AMSTERDAM

De ondergeteekende, ambtenaar voor de  
aanmelding, verklaart dat de aan-  
wezige aangeduide persoon, opgenomen in  
het Bevolkingsregister dezer gemeente,  
heeft voldaan aan de verplichting tot  
aanmelding volgens de bovengenoemde  
Verordening.

Afgegeven op 29 APRIL 1941

in Gemeente AMSTERDAM

Voor den Burgemeester,  
De Administrateur  
ald. Bev. register en Verkiezingen,

De Lairesestr 4 hs

NR.

Geestl. nr.

a. Lichtenstern

b. Heinz

Voors.

Geboren op

14 Apr 1907

Gem.

Thorn

Land

Duitschland

Laatste woonplaats in het  
Groot-Duitsche Rijk of in het  
Gouvernement-Generaal van  
het bezette Poolsche gebied:

Keulen

Nation.: Duitse

Vroegere nation.:

Kerkelijk  
gezindte: NI

Beroep  
of werk-  
zaamheid:  
koopman

Gehuwd  
met: Spier, Margaretha Edith

Gesch. op  
Overl.

Aantal joodsche grootouders in den  
zin van art. 2 der Verordening: vier

Heinz’s Jewish Council registration card



By then, this whole war should be over. Come, Jenny, let's take care of the rucksacks."

Before he got into bed that evening, Heinz performed his nightly ritual: double-checked that all his papers were in his billfold and made sure that the emergency bags were packed and by the front door. He was grateful that his wife was resourceful and willing to keep everything prepared. For a whole year, she had kept the children's bags ready with properly fitting clothes, and she regularly updated the packed food so it wouldn't spoil.

The last part of the ritual was checking in on the children. Then Heinz and Margret headed to bed, and the apartment was soon quiet.



In the middle of the night, Heinz woke with a start. "Margret, do you hear that?"

"I don't hear a thing. You must be dreaming."

"No, I heard something." Heinz got out of bed and went to the open window. As he pulled back the curtain a fraction of an inch, he saw trucks arriving at the end of the block. SS troops began to spill out of them, and were soon joined by the Dutch police. Heinz closed the window and let the curtain fall back in place. "Margret, wake my parents. It's a raid."

Within seconds, soldiers were banging on front doors up and down the block, and a loudspeaker was squawking: "All Jews must report now. All Jews outside immediately! You may each bring one bag. All Jews outside immediately!"

Okkie, Jenny, Heinz, and Margret stood in their slippers in the living room. Heinz saw Okkie and Jenny's dazed expressions—saw that Margret looked anxious but resolute. Both his wife and mother, he noted, were holding

their robes with clenched fists over their hearts, as if the thin cotton could protect them from what was happening.

Heinz went to the window and peered out a slit in the curtains.

"How close are they?" demanded Okkie.

"About 50 meters," whispered Heinz.

"Do you have your papers?" Okkie asked.

"Yes, I have them." He did his best to muster a confident tone for his father, but his heart was pounding furiously. They would probably be safe, he told himself. He was an advisor to the Jewish Council, after all. In any case, he would be exempt from arrest because of his work in the metals business, and he had been told his position would protect his family, as well.

Heinz was glued to the window. He saw two men, neighbors, running across the rooftops on the other side of the street. He silently prayed for the safe escape of those brave souls.

"Mammi, what's happening?" Robbie was standing in the doorway rubbing his sleepy eyes. Tutti stood silently behind him clutching a doll.

"Shush, *Kinder*. There are soldiers outside. We need to be very quiet right now." Margret put an arm around each child and ushered them back to bed. Heinz could hear her singing to them in a whisper.

Then a moment later, the police pounded loudly on the door. "Open! *Politie!*" The three Dutch police burst in before the door was completely open. "Jews live here!" they shouted.

"Ja, but I have an exemption from the Jewish Council." Heinz kept his voice steady but his hand trembled as he held out his papers.

"You are Heinz Lichtenstern?"

## VOORZITTERS

(zie ook Nieuwe Keizersgracht 58, blz. 8)

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(zie ook Nieuwe Keizersgracht 58, blz. 8, 9, 10)

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(zie ook Lijnbaansgracht 396, blz. 14)

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A page from the Amsterdam Jewish Council guide listing the Advisory Board for non-Dutch Jews, including H. Lichtenstern

“Ja.”

“And this old woman, this is your wife?” he asked, looking at Jenny in disbelief.

“No, this is my mother. My wife is in the bedroom with the children.” Heinz immediately regretted saying this. What had he done? He was hoping to keep attention away from Tutti and Robbie.

“Een minuut.” The policemen took the papers and left.

Okkie went to the window. One policeman was holding the papers and talking to the German soldiers in the street. He turned back toward the building and this time entered the apartment without knocking.

"You and you," he pointed to Okkie and Jenny. "Be in the square at Daniël Willinkplein in fifteen minutes. Anyone who doesn't report will be shot."

"But I was told my family would be exempt!" insisted Heinz.

The Dutch policeman's voice had the slightest hint of compassion. "Yes, you, your wife, your children. But not your parents. They must report." An SS soldier appeared behind him in the entryway. Abruptly, his tone changed back. "I have my orders." And he left.

"Muttchen, Papa . . . they said *my family* . . ." Heinz's voice trailed off.

Jenny reached out her arms to her son.

With only fifteen minutes, they had to move quickly. There was a flurry of hugs and kisses and goodbyes. Margret grabbed some food—a loaf of bread and a hunk of cheese—and pushed it into her mother-in-law's bag. Heinz put a pencil and some paper into his father's coat pocket. "Write



Jenny, Flo, and Okkie (presumably, Louis took the photo)  
at a café in Germany (1933)

to us. Tell us where you are. I'll . . . I don't know what, but I'll do something."

"I will, son."

What Margret didn't know that night was that raids were happening all over the city, and her parents, Flo and Louis Spier, were also being forced to leave their home.

Heinz watched out the window as his parents walked away carrying their small bags. It was hard to bear, but he had to keep looking. On a whim, just before they were out of earshot, he whistled to them. "*Phweet, Phweet, Phweet, Phweet, Phweeeeeeee!*" It was the five-note whistle his family always used to find each other in crowds—something he and his brother had been taught as boys and that he had taught his own children. It might be something to hold on to during their journey.



**een minuut** (ayn mih•noot): one minute (Dutch)

**Okkie** (ah•kee): a nickname for Oscar

**politie** (poa•leet•see): police (Dutch)